Successful Academic Writing

This leaflet introduces you to the key points about successful academic writing - what kind of language to use, how to structure, how to avoid plagiarism and more. Read through the leaflet and use these techniques if you want to get good grades.

Remember, this is a summary. If you want the full info, visit the 'successful writing' area in the full version of the Successful Study Guide in Solent Online Learning.

Write well

It is really important that you remember to write your essay in an appropriately academic style. This means that you should:

- Use formal language - not slang or ‘spoken’ language
- Use correct and technical language appropriate to your subject
- Use correct, full spellings - not abbreviations or text speak
- Write in grammatically correct, well-structured sentences
- Do not write in the first person (don’t use ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘my’ or ‘mine’)

Other things you ought to consider if you want to have a good writing style are:

- Make it your aim to have writing that is clear and easy to understand
- Keep it simple, don’t use overly complex language - it’s not clever or impressive, it’s confusing and off-putting
  - Don’t try to dress up your writing with lots of long and difficult words
  - Short, simple sentences are better whenever it is possible to use them

Always check grammar and spelling with your word processing software. Try reading your writing out loud to check if it is easy to read, and always get someone else to read through your paper for the same reason.

Connect your ideas together

To make your essay easy to follow, you need to put up signposts that will help your reader find the correct way through the writing. This means you need to get into the habit of using linking expressions that connect ideas together, that show when you are moving from one idea to another and which show the relationships between ideas, for example:

‘Firstly,…’
‘Consequently,…’
‘One the one hand,…’
‘Having looked at the first cause,…’
‘The next problem to look at is…’
‘There are two opposing points of view on this.’

Layout and appearance

Your essay must be word processed on a computer, and it must follow the layout guidelines provided by your department, faculty or tutor (ask for these).

Generally, you will be expected to write in 12pt font, with 1.5 spacing and headings given in bold. The university’s font is Trebuchet MS. Put the essay title at the top of the first page. There will be an electronic cover sheet to use when doing online submissions.

There is an essay template following these guidelines available to download in Successful Academic Writing in the Successful Study Guide.
Structure your writing

An academic paper must always follow a set structure.

Introduction
- Introduces the topic
- Gives a little background
- Outlines the aims (what you are going to do in the essay)

Main Body
- Develops the introduction
- Presents your argument (following the process given in the essay question)
- Refers to your source material

Conclusion
- Suggests further reading
- Sums up and closes the essay
- Introduces new ideas and leaves the reader thinking

I. Introduction

| General background |
| Outline of aims |

II. Main Body

A. Topic sentence
1. Support
2. Support
3. Support

B. Topic sentence
1. Support
2. Support
3. Support

C. Topic sentence
1. Support
2. Support
3. Support

III. Conclusion

| Summary of main points |
| Final comment |

In our model, there are three paragraphs in the main body. In reality, the main body can have as many paragraphs as necessary to fully answer the question.

The writing process

The writing process is a series of steps you should take in order to make sure your essay is well thought out and well structured.

1. analyse the question
2. brainstorm
3. plan
4. research
5. draft
6. edit/revise
7. final draft

Pre-writing

Repeat as necessary

Avoid plagiarism

Plagiarism is a real problem in university writing – for the university and for you; if you do not know how to avoid it, you could lose marks.

To avoid plagiarism and to show that you have done research to back up your paper’s ideas, you must give other people’s writing in quotations and paraphrase. You must say where you took the words or ideas from. A reference is a note of the author, text title, publisher, etc. of your source. A reference list is a list of all of the sources you have referred to in your paper which you must put at the end of your essay.

At Solent University, the majority of subjects use the Harvard Referencing System. There is a detailed explanation of how to use this system in the online tutorial ‘Successful Referencing’, which you can find in the Successful Study Guide.

learn.solent.ac.uk

Southampton Solent University, East Park Terrace, Southampton, Hampshire SO14 0YN